

The
ANGELUS

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The Angelus
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by
Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap.

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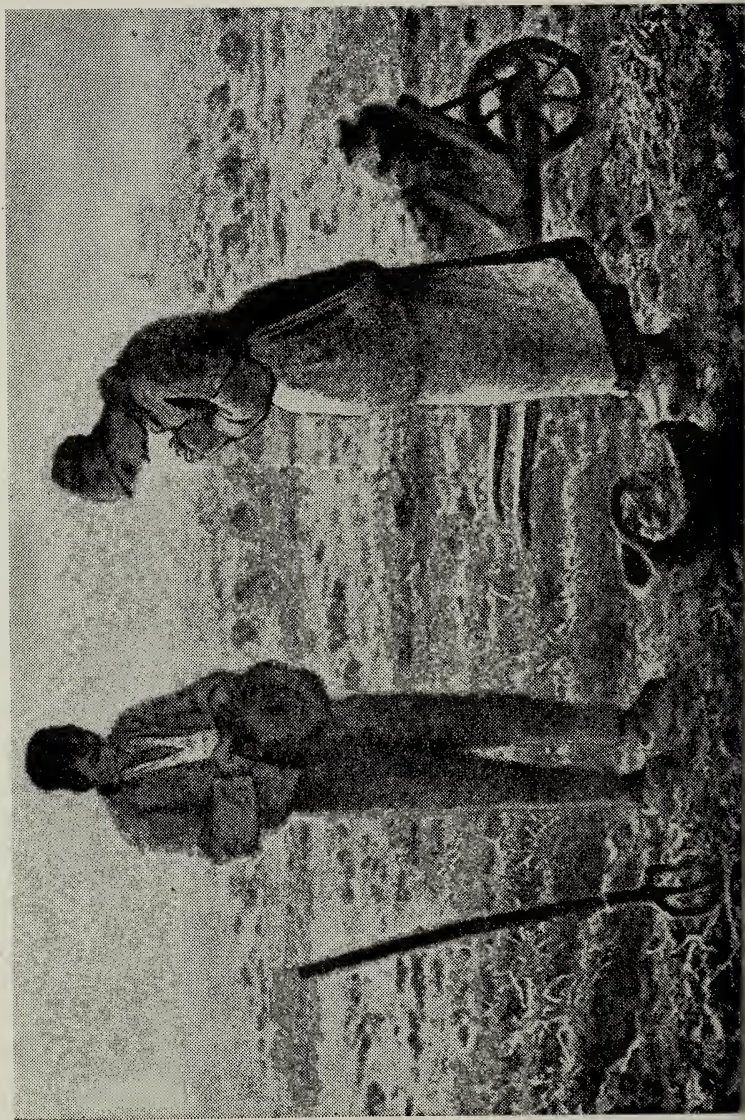
Its Meaning and History



by

DOMINIC J. UNGER,

O.F.M.Cap., S.T.L., S.S.L.



Deacidified

"ANGELUS"

The Angel of the Lord declared
unto Mary.

And she conceived of the Holy
Ghost.

Hail Mary, etc.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord.
Be it done unto me according to
your word!

Hail Mary, etc.

And the Word was made flesh.
And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, etc.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of
God!

That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.

LET US PRAY

Pour forth, we beseech You, O Lord,
Your grace into our hearts; that we to
whom the incarnation of Christ, Your
Son, was made known by the message of
the Angel, may, by His Passion and Cross,
be brought to the glory of His resurrec-
tion. Through the same Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

INTRODUCTION

The frontispiece of our pamphlet shows a painting that is known even to school children and is beloved of all people. It is the most popular of the masterpieces of the French painter Jean Francois Millet (1814-1875). It depicts the scene of two peasants in a harvest field. The musical sound of the noon day bell is wafted across the fields. The peasants pause in their work; in reverence they bow their heads and pray the Angelus.

Millet's picture breathes reverence. It inspires peace and contentment. The artist, famous for depicting the peasant type of sturdy virtue, has here succeeded superbly in portraying the dignity of labor and the manliness of prayer. Labor, this painting tells us, is of greatest dignity—only when the laborer is in contact with His Creator. Such labor-union alone justifies the beads of sweat on the brow and the calluses on the hands. The Angelus prayer, morning, noon and night, is eminently suited to foster communion of the laborer with His God.

From boyhood days there lingers in my mind the memory of a picture. In my town a middle-aged man was walking home from his flour-mill for dinner. The Angelus bell began to ring. Immediately he took off his hat, and

holding it in hand, walked along. When the bell ceased sounding, he put on his hat again. He had prayed the Angelus. That was not the only day he did this. What a beautiful and manly custom! What a fruitful practice! He had inherited it from the emerald Isle.

It was a Presbyterian, Robert Lynd, who, in his *Home Life in Ireland*, wrote this fine tribute.

If you are in a little town in any part of Ireland—except the northest—about noon, when the chapel bells ring for the Angelus, you will see all the men suddenly taking off their hats and crossing themselves as they say their midday prayers. The world loses its air of work, or of the commonplace idleness, and the streets take on an intense beauty for the moment, as the old people and the young people half hide their eyes to murmur a rapid prayer to the Mother of God. The boy walking by a loaded cart stands still with bared head, or stumbles forward, praying as he walks. In the doors of the houses, in the entries on the bridge over the river, the town assumes a multitudinous reverence as the tide of prayer sweeps through it to the dinning music of the bell. Even the policeman, ludicrously stiff in his military uniform, lowers his head with a kind of salute, and offers homage to heaven. I confess I like this daily forgetfulness of

the world in the middle of the day. It brings wonder into almost every country town in Ireland at least once a day.

Similar tributes could be paid to other countries, especially when Catholicism was an atmosphere in which people lived there. There was Germany and Italy and England—yes, the last of these was among the first where the practice of the Angelus flourished.

Endeavors are being made in our day toward a revival or a more enthusiastic interest in this centuries-old prayer and practice, by sermons and conferences, by leaflets and pamphlets, even by a daily broadcast of the Angelus bell and its prayer over the airwaves. It is toward this revival that I offer this brief explanation and history of the Angelus.

THE MEANING OF THE ANGELUS

The name of this prayer may sound strange to those not initiated in the Latin language. Angelus commemorates the story of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to the Mother of Jesus. In Latin, which was the language first used for the prayer, the opening word of the prayer is *Angelus*, "the Angel." Hence the name.

The Angelus was in the making for many centuries until it attained its present form. As said today it consists essentially of three Hail Mary's, each of which is preceded by a versicle and a response; and the last Hail Mary is followed by a versicle, response and prayer. The whole text is given at the beginning of this pamphlet.

The Angelus expresses the most stupendous message ever given by God to men, the news about the Redemption of mankind through the Incarnation of God himself from a lowly and humble Virgin Mother. By retelling, the story of the Annunciation as related in the divinely inspired Gospel of Saint Luke, chapter 1, verses 26-38, we can best understand the meaning of the prayer.

When "the fullness of time had come" (Gal. 4:4), as determined in the Providence of God, in the days that King Herod was ruler of Judea (Luke 1:5), God sent Gabriel, one of his Angels who assist at his throne in Heaven (Luke 1:9), to a little town of Galilee, called

Nazareth. Here there lived a humble young lady, who was a virgin, but who was espoused to the very holy man, Joseph. He, as the Virgin herself, was a descendant of the royal family of the great King David. The Virgin's name was Mary, a name that well befitted her, since in her day it probably was popularly taken to mean "Lady," and its scientific meaning may be "Highness," or "Exalted One."

Entering her home unannounced, the Angel must have found Mary at prayer—the perfect occupation for receiving this message. He greeted her: "Hail, Full of grace." "Hail," represents the Greek of Saint Luke, which really means "Rejoice." It has commonly been asserted that St. Luke merely interpreted the usual Hebrew greeting, "Peace be to you," since the Angel no doubt spoke in the Aramaic language, Mary's language. Today, however, scholars incline to think that the Angel used a term that actually invited Mary to rejoice, a term that is found in some Messianic prophecies. And so the Angel's first word would indicate that he came to announce the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah who would bring joy to the world.

Immediately the Angel addressed the Virgin, not by her personal name, but by a very special title: "Full-of-grace." This expression, so familiar to us, is freighted with meaning. I have used hyphens to indicate that it is a title of Mary, given in the Greek of St. Luke by one word. We might coin a parallel like

“all-graced.” The Greek perfect participle in this case indicates that Mary possesses to the fullest measure what the stem of the verb implies, namely, grace.

The grace that Mary possessed so fully and by which she is in turn possessed so fully is sanctifying grace. This she had received already at the first moment of her existence, when she was immaculately conceived in her own mother’s womb. Mary was so full of grace that she possessed more than all Angels and men taken together. Besides sanctifying grace, the fullness of grace meant here includes also the very exceptional, entirely unique and fundamental favor that God bestowed on Mary and about which the Angel came to tell her, her divine, virgin Motherhood.

After that greeting the Angel assured Mary: “The Lord is with you.” This phrase, found rather frequently in the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, expresses the fact that God is with Mary in a very special manner, because he is conferring on her a most exceptional and difficult office. In it she will certainly be successful, since God himself, the Lord Omnipotent, will give all the help needed.

Whether at this point the Angel pronounced the special praise of Mary, “Blessed are you among women,” is not certain, since it is missing here in a few of the more important manuscripts. No matter. It is certain that, not many days later, Saint Elizabeth, under divine

inspiration, uttered this praise of her cousin Mary. The clause is couched in Hebrew idiom for the superlative degree, and means that Mary is more blessed than all other women.

All in all the divine messenger's praise was surely exceptional for a young Jewish lady of lowly station. Small wonder that in her humility, Mary feared at hearing such praise bestowed on her. Still she remained entirely self-possessed and kept pondering what manner of greeting this really was. The Angel quickly informed her: "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found grace with God." The Angel, in other words, said, "Mary, you are most pleasing to God; He is granting you a very great favor." Continuing, the divine herald unburdened himself of his message:

*"And behold, you shall conceive in your womb
and shall bring forth a son;
and you shall call his name Jesus.*

*He shall be great,
and he shall be called the Son of the
Most High;
and the Lord God will give him the
throne of David his father,
and he shall be King over the house of
Jacob forever;
and of his kingdom there shall be no
end."*

What a wonderful son Mary will have! Indeed, the Prophet Isaias had announced Him as "the wonderful" (Isa. 9:6). He is the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God. He is the

Savior of mankind, whose name itself, Jesus, means that he will save his people from their sins, as the Angel will later explain to Joseph (Matt. 1:21). He is the great King whose kingdom will never end; it is everlasting as he himself is everlasting, as the great prophet Daniel had already foretold (Dan. 7:14).

What a wonderful child the Angel promised Mary! What? A child to Mary? But how? "How shall this happen?" asked Mary, looking for an explanation, since "I do not know man." She wished to say that she had made a firm and sacred resolve never to make use of a wife's rights with her spouse. She had decided, undoubtedly under divine guidance, to remain a virgin always, even though for protection she espoused Joseph, who had also determined to remain a virgin.

The Angel did not leave Mary in doubt for long. He assured her:

*"The Holy Spirit shall come upon you,
and the power of the Most High shall
overshadow you:
and therefore the Holy One to be born
shall be called the Son of God."*

How delicately and simply stated! Mary will remain a virgin while at the same time she will be the greatest mother ever to exist, the Mother of the Son of God. This will elevate her to the highest dignity a mere creature can receive even from God. All this by the miraculous creative power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love Divine.

Then, by way of re-assurance, though Mary had not doubted the Angel's message, he gave her a sign of the truth of the message: Elizabeth, her cousin, is with child. She who had been sterile and who was now beyond the child-bearing age conceived a child by God's omnipotence. "For nothing shall be impossible with God." Neither, therefore, shall the virginal conception of Mary's divine Child be impossible.

Now the Angel is waiting. His message has been delivered. God in his infinite goodness did not wish to force motherhood on Mary, even Divine Motherhood. God, too, is waiting . . . waiting for Mary's answer. In a sense, God made the Incarnation of his Son and the consequent redemption of mankind depend on the consent of the Redeemer's Mother. He wanted her to share in the closest way in her Son's work of Redemption, not only in the distribution of the graces acquired, but already in the very first act bringing Redemption. And the first step would be Mary's consent, free and generous, to be the Mother of the Redeemer, to make it possible for the Son of God to be born of our race and to offer himself for man's Redemption. What will Mary's answer be? Without delay, most humbly but resolutely she replied:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

Be it done to me according to your word."

Mary meant to say, "I am the lowly servant of the Lord Almighty. Let him achieve in me,

and with me, what he has expressed in the message that you have brought. God's holy will be done."

The Angel's mission is ended. He left as quietly as he had come. Saint John states the mystery simply:

*"And the Word was made flesh,
and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).*

Immediately upon Mary's consent to be the Mother of the Messiah the Holy Spirit wrought the marvel of the Incarnation of the Son of God in the immaculate sanctuary of the Virgin Mary's womb. Pope Pius XII, quoting Saint Thomas, writes in his encyclical on the Mystical Body, "'In the name of the whole human race,' She gave consent for 'spiritual nuptials between the Son of God and human nature.'" Thereby she became the Mediatrix and Spiritual Mother of all men as well as the Mother of God's Son and our Redeemer.

THE ANGELUS ITSELF

In telling the story of the Annunciation we have explained also the three versicles of the Angelus.

The first versicle is: "The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary." This is a summary of the entire message of the Annunciation, as if we were saying: "The Angel of the Lord brought a message to Mary."

The response is: *"And she conceived of the Holy Ghost."* That was the purpose of the

message, and the effect. The Angel told Mary that God was inviting her to be the Mother of the Redeemer. She accepted the invitation. Then, as the Angel had promised, she conceived the Son of God through a miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit, thus becoming the greatest Mother and still remaining the most perfect Virgin.

Since Mary's part in this initial step of Redemption was of such importance, we emphasize it by singling out her consent in the *second versicle*: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord*" and in its response: "*Be it done to me according to your word.*" The meaning and import of this we explained above.

In the *third versicle* we put in bold relief the fact of the Incarnation, as resulting from the Annunciation. We clothe our prayerful thought in the immortal and picturesque words of Saint John: "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*" Words that describe the Incarnation of the Eternal Word of God by assuming flesh, our human nature complete with body and soul, from the Virgin Mary, and thus dwelling among us, pitching his tent (as the Greek verb implies) on our earth for the time of his sojourn. Simplest metaphor expressive of the sublimest mystery!

The Hail Mary was originally the only part of the Angelus, and is today its heart. In the story of the Annunciation, we explained the first phrases of the Hail Mary. Now we will continue with the rest. We noted above that

if the Angel did not address to Mary the words, "Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth certainly did (Luke 1:42). But Elizabeth also added: "And blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42). Truly, Mary's Child is "blessed"; he is the source of all blessing. To that was added, in the Middle Ages, the name of *Jesus*, who is the fruit, the child, of Mary's womb. Thus the first part of the Hail Mary is complete.

The second half was composed and added in the Middle Ages. There is a credible tradition that it was the Franciscan Friars who began the practice of adding "pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." It is a petition to Mary to exercise her powerful intercession with God in our behalf, since she is God's Mother. That is why we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God." It is particularly as "sinners" that we have need of the intercession of Our Mother of mercy; and precisely "now" at every moment of our lives, but most of all "at the hour of our death," when Satan's assaults will be renewed; at the hour of our death, the most important moment of our lives, on which will depend our unending life thereafter, in that moment we must make good; in that moment we have particular need of the guiding hand and understanding heart of our Mother. We, therefore, make this request of her: "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

The Angelus concludes with a prayer preceded by a versicle. The versicle is simply an expression of our belief and trust in the intercessory power of Mary with God. We pray for the greatest blessing possible—to be made worthy of the blessings promised us through the Redemption of Christ: “Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.”

The prayer itself commemorates the vocation of Jesus and Mary, the Incarnation of the Eternal Word from the Virgin Mother.

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace in our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of your Son was made known to us by the message of the Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of the resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

We address this petition to God the Father: “O Lord.” As the motive for our petition we appeal to the fact that God gave us a knowledge of the Incarnation through the message of the Angel Gabriel: “That we unto whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of the Angel.” The favor that we petition is a further infusion of God’s grace into our hearts for the greater perfection of our spiritual lives: “Pour forth, we beseech you, . . . your grace into our hearts.” But the goal of our petition and the final fruit of our life of grace is to be the glo-

rious resurrection. This, however, we hope to obtain through the Passion and Death of Christ: "may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of the resurrection."

REASONS FOR PRAYING THE ANGELUS

Why should we pray the Angelus? The reasons can be gathered from the very thoughts expressed in the Angelus and from its historic development. One may say, in general, that the reasons are two: to give honor and glory to God, to Christ and to Mary; and to bring salvation and peace to men. The Angelus is, in other words, a prayerful echo of the Angel's song: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will."

The prayer deals expressly with the mystery of the Incarnation, of how the Son of God became man through the consent and cooperation of the Ever-Virgin Mary. To recall this mystery over and over again in the Angelus is indeed an easy yet effective manner of giving glory to God, to the Incarnate Word and to his Immaculate Mother. It must be most pleasing to them. It is a composition of praise for Mary made by God himself and the Church. Besides, this prayer is a commemoration of the Passion of Jesus. It is meant to give glory to God in the highest, and also to Christ the redeemer and his Virgin Mother.

It is related that Saint Mechtilda one day wished that she could honor Mary as no creature had yet done. Mary herself appeared to her with the Angel's salutation written in golden letters across her breast. She assured the Saint: "No one has yet surpassed this salutation, and no one can give me a more welcome greeting than that given to me by God the Father through that Ave." Let us salute Mary with the prayer she loves so dearly and esteems so highly.

In the Angelus we ask for the greatest blessings for ourselves and all people. The words themselves express this reason. In the Hail Mary we beg for the gift of final perseverance through Mary's help at the hour of our death, and in the Prayer we request the further infusion of graces that will lead to a glorious resurrection. These benefits are really summed up in the second part of the Angel's song: "And peace on earth to men of good will." Peace of soul is the result and the sum of all the blessings that we can lawfully enjoy on earth. It is *the* blessing we desire so much to receive through the Incarnation and Redemption of Mary's Son, the Prince of Peace. The Angelus should be our special prayer for peace each day—morning, noon and night. We will then realize the Angels' chant: "And peace on earth to men of good will."

The Angelus is in a true sense the commemoration of the vocations of Jesus and Mary, the two greatest vocations ever to be

given by God. In God's eternal decree the vocation or call was given to Jesus and Mary. It is therefore very natural to consider the Angelus a special vocation prayer. For anyone who must yet choose his vocation the Angelus is a prayer for divine guidance and courage to make the proper choice. For one already settled in his vocation, the Angelus is a prayer for successfully fulfilling God's will in the state that has been chosen. We can pray it too for the vocation of others.

An inspiring practice would be the family recitation of the Angelus when gathered at table for grace before meals. Through it each child, as his turn comes, would be guided by God to choose his vocation wisely according to his plan; the parents and those children who have already made their choice would be given the grace to be successful in their state of life. Making the choice and success of vocations such a "family affair" will certainly draw down God's blessings.

In conclusion to this section on the fruits of the Angelus, it should be noted that this prayer is richly indulgenced. See the end of the pamphlet for the indulgences.

EVERYONE'S PRAYER

Everyone receives benefits from the Incarnation and Redemption and from Mary's cooperation in this work of salvation; everyone has need of the grace and peace that will lead

to a glorious resurrection. For that reason we should pray the Angelus daily. There is hardly an excuse for not doing so. It is so simple to remember and takes so little time. To pause three times daily—this need not be exactly at six, twelve and six, as long as it is in the morning, at noon and in the evening—to pause for a few moments to say the Angelus, is a splendid means of spiritual recollection.

The Angelus can be said anywhere. In the home, of course, it should be said by the family in common as far as possible, or at least by those who happen to be at home. It can be said in the office, in the workshop, in the factory. It can be said while walking along the street. It can be said very naturally in the field, immortalized in the painting of Millet.

In every circumstance the Angelus can certainly be said privately, in a manner that is entirely unknown to others who might cause a disturbance over a "public" Angelus. But where possible it would be praiseworthy if Catholic workers would pause in their work for the Angelus, fold their hands and bow their heads while answering a leader of the group. Should the work be of such a nature that it cannot be discontinued even for these few minutes, the Angelus could still be recited aloud by someone and answered by the others without interfering with the work.

For a number of years, the Angelus has been broadcast from some radio stations each evening at six o'clock. This is a modern, rather

simple, but effective means of encouraging the Angelus. During the Marian year of 1954 the Holy Father himself several times led the Angelus over the Vatican radio.

Join the modern crusade for saying the Angelus daily wherever you are, especially as a family prayer in your home. By the daily recitation of the Angelus we could change the world for the better. Your own little world will take on a new beauty, particularly for that one moment when you stand with bowed head and whisper Mary's prayer to the music of Mary's bell.

The Angelus is recommended especially to mothers. By their motherly influence they can be instrumental in having the Angelus prayed daily in their homes. And the Angelus is a reminder to all mothers of the supreme dignity of motherhood, elevated by Mary's consent to be the Mother of God. Mary made it possible for all mothers to give birth to children who could be incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, and be heirs of heavenly glory. Without Mary's consent this would not have been possible. Mothers would have given birth to children who could never have had even the slightest hope of enjoying an unending happiness in a face to face vision of God. The Angelus recalls this outstanding participation of all mothers in the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption through the cooperation of the Ever-Virgin Mother.

Mothers by their example and influence can train the children to love the Angelus so that its recitation will be second nature for them even outside the home. Bishop Sailer was visiting a small town in rural Germany. The children were putting on a program for him. A little girl of ten was the first speaker. Just as she came on stage the Angelus bell began to sound. For a moment she was embarrassed. But only for a moment. With a clear voice she announced very naively: "I think before we begin we had better pray the Angelus." And they did. The Bishop was highly pleased and commented on the practical education of the child.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANGELUS

The Angelus has an interesting history. But it is not to be viewed as a mere antique in some museum, but as a living prayer, venerable with age, increasing in beauty through the centuries, and carrying within itself the rejuvenating spirit of the Church.

No universal decree of the Pope gave rise to the recitation of the Angelus morning, noon and night, according to the present-day form. It developed gradually over many centuries, and is a combination of a number of practices. Specific details have been lost, but we do know the broad outlines. At first there were some prayers at the ringing of a bell in

the monasteries in the early Middle Ages, which became a signal also for the people to pray. Later at this ringing of the bell the Hail Mary was recited, first by Religious, then by the people too. It was these Hail Marys that gradually, through a few centuries, took the form of our Angelus. At first the Aves were recited only in the evening, soon also in the morning, and only later at noon. The history of the Angelus falls into these three parts, according to this gradual development.

THE EVENING ANGELUS

That King Alfred of England began the custom of the Angelus is mere legend. As early as the tenth century in some Benedictine monasteries a bell was rung before Matins, before Prime or Tierce and after Compline. At each of these three bells special psalms and prayers were said, especially after Compline. The people too were encouraged to say some prayers when they heard these bells. Such a custom existed in Germany in the tenth century. After Compline some boys would say three prayers. The Abbot rang the bell and said three prayers with his confreres. A similar practice is recorded for England. In the monastic rule *Regularis concordia* which was composed about 975 by Saint Aethelwold of Winchester, we find the instruction that three prayers preceded by five psalms are to be said after Compline as well as before Matins and before

Prime. Since the bell is mentioned for Matins and Prime, it can be presumed for Compline. The same custom is found later in other English monasteries.

People were soon encouraged to pray along when they heard the monastic bell. Later the church bell was rung for this purpose. The first record of this is the ruling of the Synod of Caen in 1061, which ordered the bell to be rung daily in the evening for calling the people to prayer, after which they were to retire to their homes and close the town gates.

Historians argue whether the curfew bell was in existence first, to which this religious practice was attached. There is no doubt that in the Middle Ages many regulations were made for civic life. Among these was the ringing of a bell in the evening to end work and to clear the people off the streets. The custom seems to have begun in Normandy. At least from there the bell got its name of *curfeu*, from the old French *couvrefeu*, because at this bell also the fires had to be put out. In some places the curfew and the prayer bell were combined. But that seems to have been rare and accidental. Usually the town tower bell was used for the curfew, and the church bell for prayer. And, all things considered, the prayer bell seems to have existed first and is not a development of the curfew.

An early purpose of such prayer at the evening bell was peace. That is why the bell itself is called the peace bell. For instance, in the

thirteenth century we have record of a peace bell at St. Omers that sounded the closing of the taverns.

The first certain sources about the Hail Mary being recited at this prayer bell come from the second half of the thirteenth century. That Pope Saint Gregory IX (1227-1241) ordered the ringing of the evening bell in 1239 for the success of the crusades is doubtful. So is the report that Bishop Henry of Brixen granted an indulgence to the church of Freins for three Aves at the evening bell in 1239.

The sons of Saint Francis were pioneers here as in other Marian practices. At their chapter at Assisi in 1269, with Saint Bonaventure as General, the Friars were admonished to encourage the people in sermons to offer the greeting to Mary several times at the Compline bell. "The greeting" spoken of is without doubt the Hail Mary in its shortened form of those days. Some manuscripts add that *three* Hail Marys were to be said. The *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals*, which records this, has a similar note already for the chapter at Pisa in 1263. But historians feel that the first time this occurred was in 1269. At Arezzo, Italy, Friar Benedict Sinigardi urged his friars to sing the antiphon *Angelus Domini locutus est Mariae* every evening after Compline. Later, in 1295 at the Provincial chapter of the Franciscans at Padua it was ordered that every evening there should be a triple bell with three Aves said kneeling.

A certain Bonviceno da Riva, of the Order of Humiliati, who died about 1314, introduced the Ave Maria bell at Milan and the surrounding country toward the end of the thirteenth century. On his tombstone the epitaph requests an Ave for his soul, since he had begun the custom of the Ave at Milan.

At the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino, the bell was prescribed for the evening and morning, at which the Ave was to be said according to the Constitutions of Abbot Thomas I 1285-1288. From this abbey the custom spread to the abbeys in Aprutio, Apulia, and Calabria. Perhaps contemporary with St. Bonaventure is the ruling at St. Denis that after Compline the prior shall ring the bell three times, and all should recite prayers.

At the provincial synod of Estyergom, Hungary, in 1307 the Archbishop of Grau made the recitation of the Aves obligatory in Hungary and granted an indulgence of ten days for them. This decree seems to take the practice for granted and merely makes it obligatory for all. In 1308 Bishop Ponce de Aquilaniu (1308-1313) decreed that after Compline, as the shades of evening are falling, the bell should be rung with three pauses, and all the faithful wherever they might be, should kneel, if possible, and recite the Ave Maria out of reverence and in honor of Mary, our Advocate with Christ.

About this time the popes took interest in the practice to the extent of issuing orders

about it and granting indulgences. In 1308 Pope John XXII approved the custom of saying three Aves at the sound of the bell, while kneeling, for the diocese of Saintes, France, and granted an indulgence of ten days for it. In 1327 this same Pope ordered that in Rome the three Aves be said at the sound of the evening bell, for which he granted an indulgence.

In 1324 Bishop John of Stratford in Winchester, England, prescribed the Ave for the evening bell in his diocese. The Ave was to be recited three times at each of the three peals of the bell.

De laudibus Papiae, a book written at Avignon in 1331, orders the toper's bell to be rung every evening as a signal for the drinking to stop in the taverns. This was to be rung after the bell for the Salutation of Our Lady. Evidently the Aves were here recited to the tune of a bell. There is a record in 1324 that three Aves were recited at the sound of a bell at the monastery of Chartres. In 1346 Talph of Shrewsbury, Bishop of Bath, ordered the clergy of the cathedral to say daily, morning and evening, five Aves for the living and the deceased. In 1391 we have again a papal favor: Boniface IX granted an indulgence of three years and forty quarantines to the church of Saint Martin at Emmerich in the diocese of Utrecht for reciting the Pater and Ave three times, every morning and evening, at the bell of the *Ave Maria*. It is interesting

to note that the bell is called the Ave Maria bell even though Paters were also said. In 1399 Thomas of Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, at the request of Henry IV, ordered the college of Gordon to salute Mary in the morning and in the evening.

Note that during all this time the number of the Aves was not uniform. In some places in England as many as nine were said. In other places the Our Father was also recited. Still other prayers were added, especially about 1500, usually with some reference to the Passion of Jesus. In Italy, later still, there arose the custom of adding the *De profundis* (Psalm 129) for the Poor Souls to the evening bell, and / or three Glories in honor of the Blessed Trinity for the privilege bestowed on Mary.

One should not pass over in silence another class of witnesses to the ringing of a bell while a prayer to Mary was said. Many bells themselves in the Middle Ages had inscriptions often having reference to Mary. Some have only the name *Maria*. Others have a verse. The earliest discovered is at Helfta, near Eisleben, Germany, dated 1234. On this bell are inscribed the first clause of the Hail Mary in Latin: "Ave, Maria, gratia plena. Dominus tecum." At Moissac, France, a bell dated 1273 has a Latin inscription from the Hail Holy Queen: "Salve, Regina misericordiae." In the Church of San Domingo de la Palma, Majorca, there is a bell dated 1308 with the Latin inscription from the Hail Mary: "Ave, Maria,

gratia plena; Dominus tecum," plus the words: "Anno Dom. MCCCVIII Jhesu bone, praece Dominici praesta nos gratos effici. Amen.", which mean: "In the year of the Lord 1308. Good Jesus, by the prayers of Dominic grant us to be pleasing (to you). Amen."

In England we are told there are many bells inscribed to Saint Gabriel, an evident sign that they were meant to be Angelus bells. In Germany the most common inscription is: "O Rex gloriae, veni cum pace—O King of glory, come with peace." This too was an Angelus bell, because it was precisely the Angelus that was prayed for peace, to the peals of a bell. Besides, people spoke of the bell being tolled for peace.

In conclusion to this picture of the evening Angelus we cannot resist quoting the beautiful lines of Longfellow's *Evangeline* concerning the Acadians:

*Then came the laborers home from the
field, and serenely the sun sank
Down to his rest, and twilight prevailed.*

*Anon from the belfry
Softly the Angelus sounded."*

THE MORNING ANGELUS

The morning Aves soon followed those of evening, and they seem to have been an outgrowth of the prayers before Prime in the monasteries. There is already a record of the

morning Ave in the Benedictine Constitutions of Abbot Thomas I, noted above. Bishops, too, issued orders for the morning bell. The Chronicle of Parma, Italy, in 1318, tells us of the Bishops' exhorting all who hear the bell to say three times Our Father and Hail Mary for peace. *De laudibus Papiæ* of 1330, speaks of the morning Aves as recently introduced in imitation of the evening Ave. Pope Boniface IX granted an indulgence both for the morning and evening bell. By the fifteenth century the morning Aves had spread to almost all the countries.

THE NOON ANGELUS

The saying of Aves at noon was introduced later, and the beginnings of this are more obscure. Our first recorded reference is in 1386 at Prague, where each Friday five Our Fathers and Hail Marys were said for peace in honor of the Passion. A similar order was given at Mainz in 1423. Later, this noon bell is especially spoken of as the peace bell. In 1456 Pope Callistus III prescribed a crusade of prayer for the whole world against the Turks; the prayers to be said were three Our Fathers and Hail Marys. The time for saying them was between the Hours of None and Vespers. So here it seems devotion to the Passion and to the Annunciation were united. In 1472 Louis IX of France ordered the Aves to be

said at noon for peace in his kingdom. In 1475 Sixtus IV granted a three hundred days indulgence for the Aves at noon.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE ANGELUS

It was not until the sixteenth century that versicles were added to separate the Aves. These are on record for the first time in a book published at Venice in 1570. They were also printed with the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin issued by Pope Saint Pius V in 1572. After that they are found in many prayer books of England and in the *Manual of Catholics* (Manuale Catholicorum) of Saint Peter Canisius. From then on they became quite universal.

This really ends the history of the development of the Angelus. It was an established Catholic custom when in 1536 Thomas Cromwell put an interdict on the ringing of the Ave bell, introduced, as he believed, by the pretended pardon of the Bishop of Rome.

The triumph of the present form of the Angelus came on September 14, 1724, when Pope Benedict XIII granted a hundred days indulgences each time it was said, and a plenary indulgence once a month if it had been said three times daily on knees at the ringing of the bell. April 20, 1742, Benedict XIV confirmed the previous indulgences, but stipulated that during the Eastertide the *Regina Caeli* should be said standing, instead of the

Angelus; likewise, that the Angelus should be said standing the year round from the first Vespers (on Saturday) till the second Vespers on Sunday; that is, from Saturday evening (but during Lent from Saturday noon) till Sunday noon. In 1815 Pope Pius VII added three Glorys to the Angelus in thanksgiving to the Trinity for the gifts granted to the Virgin Mary, especially for her Assumption, a custom that grew up in Italy, and is still observed there in some monasteries.

The Indulgences for the Angelus today are these. The faithful who at dawn, at noon, and at eventime, or as soon thereafter as possible, devoutly recite the *Angelus*, or in Eastertide the *Regina Caeli*, or only five Hail Marys, may gain a partial indulgence of ten years as often as they do so. They may gain a plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions (Confession, Communion, a visit to a church, a prayer for the intention of the Pope) if they have performed this prayer daily for a full month. See *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, 1950, n. 331.

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